

support in his Mediterranean and colonial ambitions weighed his interest in an independent Austria. At the opening of 1938 Hitler decided to act. Summoning Schuschnigg to Berchtesgaden in February, he compelled him to take the Nazi Seyss-Inquart into the Cabinet, and on March 12 German troops crossed the frontier in order to forestall a plebiscite which was expected to reveal a substantial anti-Nazi majority. Our Ambassador at Berlin was instructed to protest against the seizure of Austria, and to say that it would produce the gravest reactions. When Neurath replied that it was not our business, Chamberlain retorted that we were interested as members of the League and as signatories of treaties providing that her independence was inalienable without the Council's consent. Explanations and protests, however, were of no avail. After more than a thousand years Austria had ceased to exist.

Czechoslovakia, with her southern frontier now open to attack, seemed likely to be the next victim. She was due ally of France, and it was an axiom that we could not allow France to be crushed. Some voices, chiefly in the Labour and Liberal camps, argued that only a public assurance of military support could save the Czechs. Others maintained that our pledges to France and Belgium were as much as we ought to undertake, and that Hitler should be allowed a free hand in central and eastern Europe. The Government chose a middle path, and on March 24 the Prime Minister addressed a warning to Berlin. If Czechoslovakia were attacked we should fulfil our duty under the Covenant. Should we go further if France helped her ally, or should we promise to fight and invite other nations to join in such a declaration? These suggestions were negatively on the ground that they would automatically destroy

our freedom of decision in relation to an area where our vital interests were not concerned in the same degree as in France and Belgium. " But while plainly stating this decision, I would add this. Where peace and war are concerned, legal obligations are not alone involved, and, if war broke out, it would be unlikely to be confined to those who have assumed such obligations. It would be quite impossible to say where it would end and what Governments might become involved. The inexorable pressure of facts might well prove more formidable than formal pronouncements, and in that event it would be well within the bounds of probability that other States, besides those which were parties to the original dispute, would almost immediately become involved. This is especially